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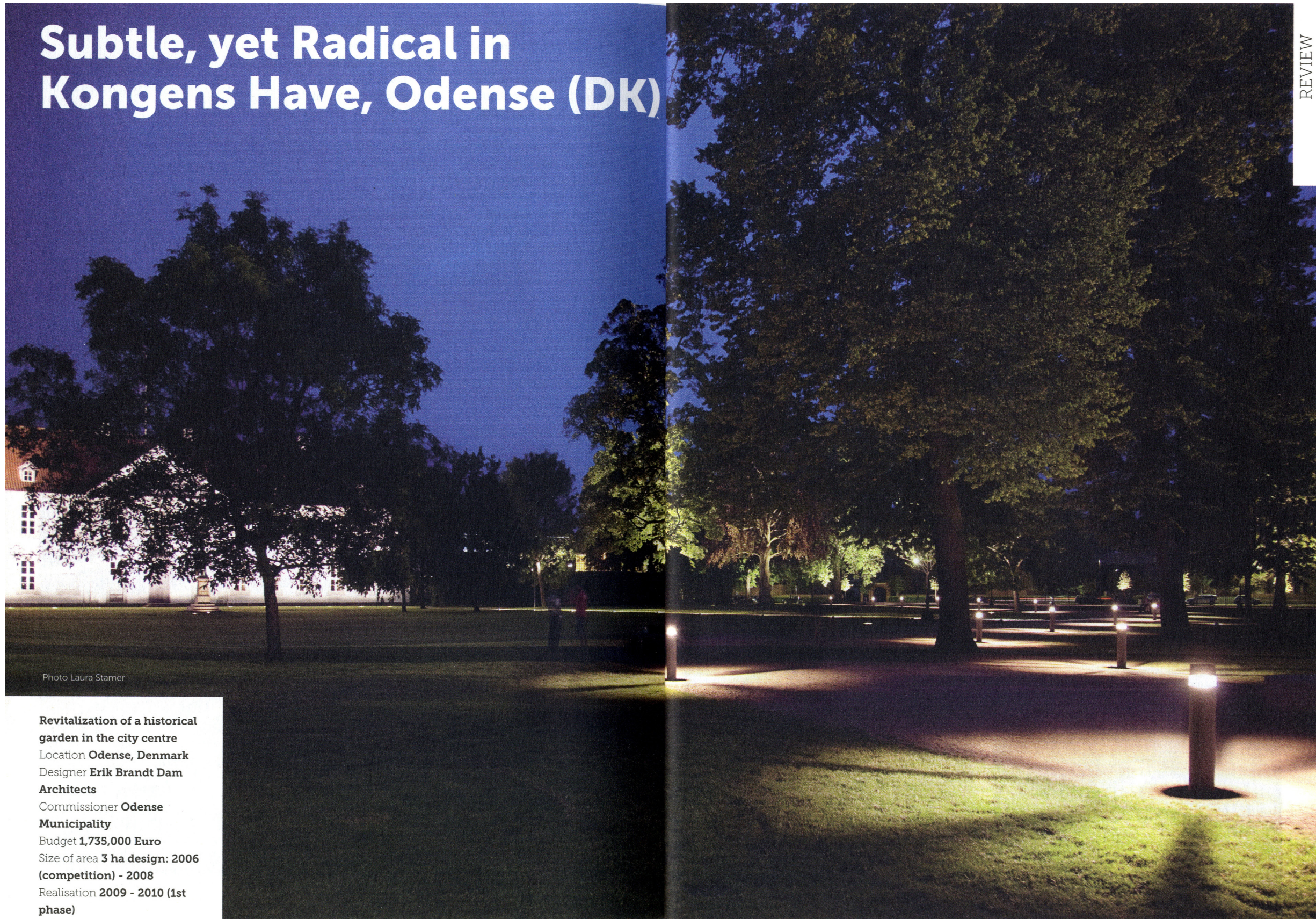
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Subtle, yet Radical in Kongens Have, Odense (DK)

Photo Laura Stamer

Revitalization of a historical garden in the city centre
Location **Odense, Denmark**
Designer **Erik Brandt Dam Architects**
Commissioner **Odense Municipality**
Budget **1,735,000 Euro**
Size of area **3 ha design: 2006 (competition) - 2008**
Realisation **2009 - 2010 (1st phase)**

REVIEW





The garden next to the Odense station. The granite edge is an invitation to sit, jump or play.

Photo Helene Høyer Mikkelsen



Impression of the entrance situation.



Impression of the Baroque allé.

Shouting out loud seems to be the overall strategy employed by numerous designers working on historical sites. By virtue of spectacular new features, several revitalization projects in the last decades have turned out to be popular, but often momentary and of poor design. Kongens Have in Odense by Erik Brandt Dam Arkitekter, on the other hand, talks to us in a soft voice, displaying a delicate intricacy. The design for Kongens Have is apparently subtle, yet radical in its effect. It combines existing structures with modest interventions. Such an approach may often be richer and more long-lived than design statements that easily take the complexity out of historical places.

Gateway

In 2005 the municipality of Odense, Denmark's third largest city, organized a design competition to revitalize the centrally located Kongens Have (The King's Garden). Eight studios – all Danish – were invited to participate. Brandt Dam's proposal won and the jury praised it for its respect towards the garden's spirit, while creating a new narrative. Two jurors, however, considered Brandt Dam's design 'rather boring'. The controversy between the jurors was particularly noticeable, and it exposes a broader challenge that historical places face when they are the subject of architectural competitions. Expectations of easily communicated, highly visible features often arise, while more subtle interventions may have a hard time. The revitalization was initially

triggered by Odense Theatre, as it planned to extend its property into the garden. To prevent the building project Kongens Have was listed in 2005, and thus the city had to formulate a plan for its future development. Odense municipality made use of the opportunity to solve several problems: once an enclosed baroque garden and later the city's dignified doorstep, the area was now a gateway from the train station to the centre. This former place of residence had become a place of transit. Many old trees were dying, while the garden was little used during the day and considered unsafe after dark. The plan for Kongens Have was that it should remain an effective passageway, but it should be more than that. A new design should stimulate a multiplicity of uses and users, house quiet oases, play areas and large events, and resolve the complexity of traffic flows.

Open the garden

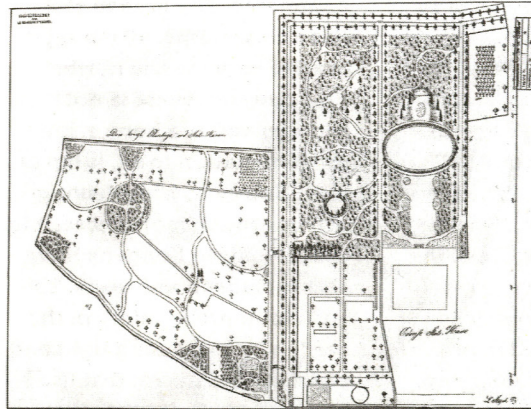
A royal complex is undemocratic by nature. The first royal palace and garden on this site dates back to the 1720s, when Denmark had an absolute monarchy. The garden became public property in 1848, but physically still appeared exclusive, with only a limited number of entrances through the enclosing hedges and trees.

Brandt Dam's vital intervention has been to open up the garden towards the city and people's everyday lives. The hedges were removed and tree crowns pruned from below for increased visibility. Yet, the difference between garden and city has not been

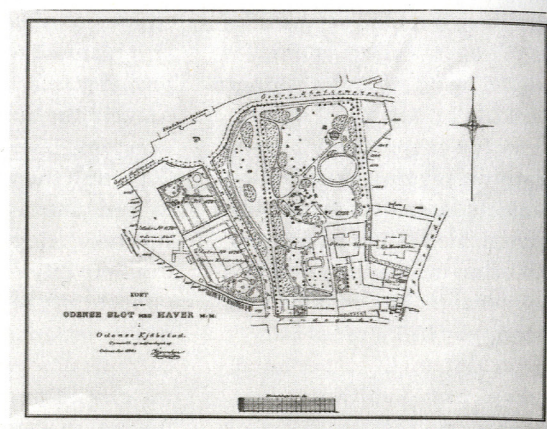
obliterated. The garden still has a clear frame: 40 cm high granite edges to the north. This new enclosure is not experienced as a border, but as an invitation to sit, jump or play. However, while having become much more accessible, the revitalized Kongens Have also excludes some users. The wish to improve safety in the garden by increasing light and visibility has meant that the homeless and other 'alternative' users have been marginalized.

These mechanisms of changing users and perceptions are a tricky part of all urban revitalization processes.

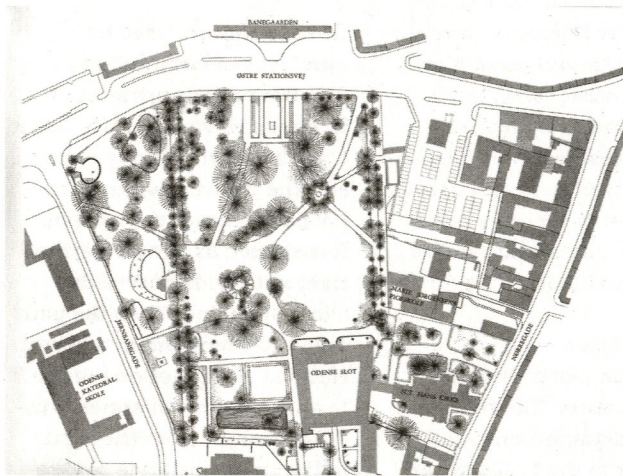
Odense station, used by hundreds of commuters every day, lies to the northeast of Kongens Have. To create a fast track between the city centre and the trains, a wide diagonal path crosses the garden. It is shaped as a meandering river with wide curves that allow lingering. Thus the path combines movement and rest. Halfway it crosses one of the former baroque avenues, running straight from the castle to the small entrance square at the main street. Previously, the square was oval-shaped and dominated by a monumental statue of King Christian IX, erected in 1912. By slightly shifting the avenue and replacing the oval with a small plaza, the statue is no longer the main point of focus and is experienced as merely decorative: a simple, postmodern trick, emphasizing that the garden today has a public rather than a royal ambience. Slightly adapting the existing structures, and changing the relations between them, has



Situation, 1800-1850.



Situation, 1899.



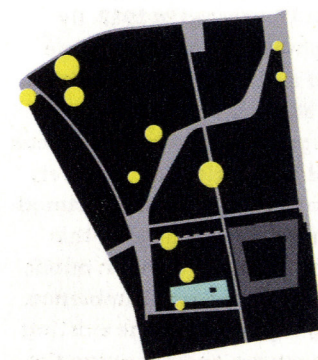
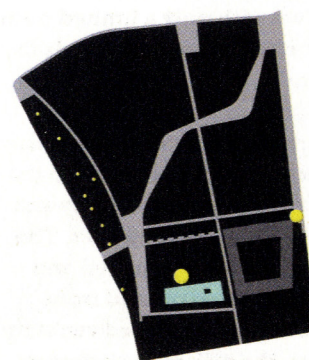
Situation, 1963.



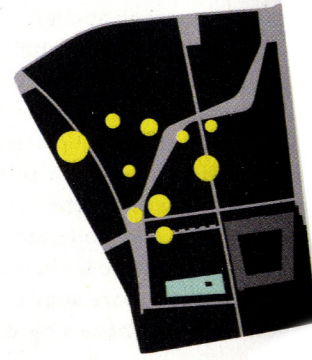
Existing situation, 2006.



Plan, phase 1.

Five out of six lightning diagrams.
Monday - distended.

Tuesday - Malus.



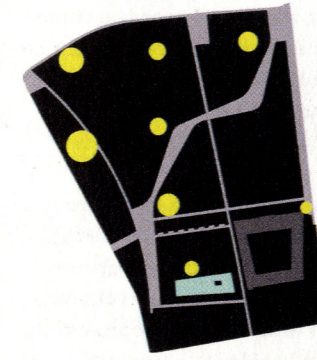
Wednesday - concentration.



Thursday - parterre garden.



Friday - transport.



Saturday - romance.

been a successful approach to reinventing the historic garden.

Inclusive approach

Like countless European baroque gardens, Kongens Have was redesigned as picturesque, with later additions in the 20th century. When dealing with such multi-layered places the designer faces a choice: should the future garden let one particular historical layout stand out as clearly as possible, following an *Unité de Style* approach? Bearing in mind that selecting one period means opting another period out. Or should one show that each époque has its own right to exist and therefore display several layers? Brandt Dam chose this more inclusive approach towards the history of Kongens Have. However, the design is not all-embracing, but has involved certain choices, as is always the case in renovation projects. The traces of two bunkers from the Second World War in the western part of the garden, for instance, were eliminated as part of the revitalization.

Curiosity

All teams in the Kongens Have competition retained more than one temporal layer, and some proposed keeping them distinct: one part of the garden mainly baroque, another as a landscape garden. Brandt Dam's proposal took a less didactic approach; the remains of the garden's history intertwine in ways that evoke curiosity. One of the former baroque axes remains incomplete and becomes legible only when lit. Most visitors will probably not recognize this

reference as historical information. Rather, the gardens offer a sensuous experience that leaves much open to the imagination.

The revitalization of Kongens Have is an example of how the smallest means can make the greatest changes. The garden is more strongly connected to the city and inter-relates historical remains anew. In refusing the loud, one-liner statement the project may be more open to different interpretations and uses. Could similar minimalistic approaches be used outside of the city centre, in places that are neither royal nor acknowledged as historic treasures? What about the places that cover much of our surface area, yet are often absent in architectural history: suburban loose ends and industrial distribution spaces? Can relatively small interventions create vital change there? Each intervention must fit the specific site, but Brandt Dam's demonstrates that gentle alterations can be valuable.

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'... to open up the garden towards the city and the people's everyday lives'.

Photo Helene Høyer Mikkelsen

